COMMERCIAL CONNECTION OF INDIA WITH A BRITISH COLONY - A CASE STUDY OF INDO-CAPE TRADE, 1797-1802.

Professor Amba Prasad

Some interesting light is thrown by the records available in the National Archives of India, official consultations as well as private papers of Lord Macartney, first Governor of the British possession of the Cape of Good Hope, and the records in the India Office Library, London, in respect of India's trade with this early British Colony.[1] On the basis of these it is possible to form an idea of the nature, value and volume of Indian exports towards the end of the 18th century; the growing demand for Indian manufactured goods as well as foodstuffs on the part of European settlers; the question of shipment of goods from India to the Cape, the problem of re-export and smuggling; East India Company's monopoly of trade versus licenced private trade interests; attention paid to the interest of European settlers, the English as well as the Dutch.

Prior to the British occupation in 1795, the Cape of Good Hope had been a Dutch colony and the Dutch settlers had been attracted to it. The British rule lasted in the first stage from 1795 to 1802, the Colony was lost to the Dutch in 1802 but again, in 1806, the British re-occupied it and ruled it for a century or so. The population (on the basis of a rough census of 1791), comprised of 14,600 white settlers, mostly Dutch, and 17,000 Africans who had no better status than that of slaves of their European masters.[2] Besides, with the British occupation, a British garrison was stationed in the Cape and the British settlers migrated in good number.

II. Indian Commodities needed in the Cape Colony

It may be observed that 'India' trade at this time meant Bengal trade; the bulk of the exports went from the Bengal Presidency, though there was some trade with the two other Presidencies as well. Surat trade was fast giving way to Bengal trade in respect of manufactured goods.[3]

Madras supplied to the Cape Colony grain and other food articles as is shown by the Macartney Papers.[4] Bombay supplied likewise grain, other provisions and timber. One finds in Macartney Papers a complaint about the damaged wheat supplied from Bombay and it caused enormous loss to the Government.[5]

Bengal was the Lancashire of India at this time.[6] As will be seen from the detailed statement given below, Bengal exported manufactured goods, fine, superfine and coarse piecegoods as well as some foodstuffs and other commodities. The documents throw a flood of light on the goods which were very much in demand in the Cape Colony on the part of European population.[7]

In the first year of occupation in 1796 the documents go to show the need for provisions from India such as rice and flour.[8] Next year the list of goods wanted from Bengal for the inhabitants of the Cape Colony included, besides grain and other provisions, a number of items of manufactured goods.

The List for the year 1797[9]

3000	pieces	of dark red Patna Chints with white flowers.
2000	"	of dark red Patna Chints with small coloured flowers.
1000	"	of dark black Patna Chints with very small white flowers.
2000	"	of very fine Patna Chintz.
2000	"	of Beerbhoom Sorrahs.
800	"	of Double thread Sorrahs.

In 1798, the documents give a list of the goods which the Company's Agent at the Cape had desired may be sent upon the Company's account. The list is almost the same as for the year 1797.

A list of goods sent in 1799 by the Board of Trade was as follows:-[10]

5 half pieces of gold and silver - flowered muslin.
6 petticoat pieces.
16 half pieces of flowered muslin.
6 pieces of plain muslin.

13 pieces of striped muslin.
18 pieces of muslin neck handkerchiefs.
12 pieces of muslin pocket handkerchiefs
1 Cargo Baranagore red handkerchiefs.
6 Cargoes Baranagore blue handkerchiefs
6 Cargoes petticoat red handkerchiefs.
36 pieces of plain and striped cossak.
12 pieces of Chandernagore long cloth.
24 pieces of Boglipore plain and striped cloth.
20 pieces of Chintz Boglipore.
100 pieces of baftaas.
100 pieces of Blue Baftaas.
36 pieces of Seer sucker.
12 coarse long shawls.
200 pieces of Patna Chintz.
12 pieces of Dooriah.
6 pieces of Charoonnah.
1 piece mulmul Malda flowered.
24 pieces of elatohee.
24 pieces of Bazarees.
200 coarse table elatchee.
12 dozen towels.
10 pieces of coarse Coromandal punjums.
12 pieces of Taffaties.
10½ maunds of tobacco.

Two lists which are available in the documents belong to the year 1800, one for the month of May and the other for the month of October. These lists are valuable as they indicate what goods were required, quantity required and their estimated valuse.

The List for the year 1800.

Articles required as per Indent

Chintz (Patna), 2000 pieces	To be provided at Calcutta	Rs. 36-12-0 per Cargo
Gurrahs Doorbhooj, 2000" (Supposed to be 36 by 2½)	From Soonamoohy	73-8-0 per dozen
Sannas - 1000 pieces	To be provided at Calcutta	5-12-5 per piece
Dasooties, 1200 pieces	From Soonamoohy	3-6-7 per dozen

Chintz Cossimbazar, 4000 pieces	From Cossimbazar	Rs 35-11-2 per Cargo
13 Bandeloes Blue, 1500 pieces Red, 500 pieces	From Cossimbazar	94-8-0 per dozer
Cotton Yarn, 3000 lbs. (Long string for candle wicks).	To be provided at Calcutta	28-5-7¼ per maun
Cotton Yarn fine for stockings, 3800 lbs. (Blue dyed, to be dyed at Golagore)	From Santipore	4-11-7 per maund
14 Baranagore Handkerchiefs (Blue and white square), 1000 pieces (10 in each piece)	From Baranagore	3-2-5 per piece
Sugar, 6000 maunds	From Benaras	6-8-0 per maund
Indigo, 2000 lbs.	To be provided at Calcutta	150-0-0 per maund

A later indent and estimate of 16th October, 1800, of goods required at the Cape of Good Hope and prices thereof is given below:-

Aliabad Baftaas, 2000 pieces	Rs.	3-8-0
Ballasore Sanaas, 250 pieces		8-0-0
Aliabad Sannas, 3000 pieces		6-5-0
Cassae (of Middling quality), 1000 pieces		5-4-0
Cassae (of fine quality), 150 pieces		15-5-0
Neck Handkerchiefs, 1000 pieces of fine quality		6-0-0
Sooty Romals of Middling quality, 4000 pieces (10 in each piece)		2-4-0
Dooreas narrow striped, 1500 pieces		5-0-0
Berhampats Three coloured, 15000 pieces		3-0-0
Nicquanasser, 3000 pieces		3-0-0
Palampoes for two persons, 3000 pieces		3-0-0
Check different patterns, 2000 pieces		2-0-0
Gingbams, 1000 pieces		1-4-0
Blue Baftaas of fine quality, 1500 pieces		4-0-0
Blue Baftaas of common quality, 3000 pieces		3-0-0
15 Patna Chintz Red, 14000 pieces		
Deep morning, 2000 pieces		2-0-0

Beerbhoom Gurrahs, 3000 pieces	2-0-0
Beerbhoom Bleached dasootis, 1500 pieces	5-0-0
Gunab Baftaas, 2000 pieces	4-8-0
Cotton thread for candle wicks, 4000 lbs.	0-6-0
Cotton thread for knitting (fine), 2000 lbs.	1-4-0
Shawls, 30	80-0-0
Sugar fair, 1000 bags	15-0-0
Sugar, 2000 bags	10-8-0
Sugar candy, 200 canisters	30-0-0

The lists make it clear that the cotton piece goods, fine and middling, and yarn formed the biggest export item from Bengal and brought good value.[16] Amongst the foodstuffs exported from Bengal, rice and sugar[17] were the most important. Bengal also supplied pepper,[18] indigo[19] tobacco,[20] rattans[21] bee wax,[22] timber,[23] saltpetre,[24] gunpowder,[25] seeds and plants.[26] Wheat was largely exported from Bombay and grains and other provisions were supplied from Madras.

India thus met the needs of the white population of the Cape Colony both for luxury goods, cotton piece goods as well as essential commodities. In return she imported Cape wines which were mostly consumed by the European residents in India.[27] The return was made partly in the shape of European staples imported directly from Great Britain. After the Charter Act of 1813, private enterprisers entered Indian trade. The British cotton manufacturers began to compete with Indian piece goods manufacturers. This and other factors led to the ruin of India's industry and loss of India's foreign market.[28]

India's flourishing industry and trade began to decline after 1806. From 1810, the declining trend in the sale of Indian piece goods was accelerated and by 1818, India had ceased to send piece goods to the Cape or St.Helena or Fort Marlborough, Amboyna or Java.[29] Within the next decade, 1818-1828, the revolution in reverse was completed. Indian industries were in total ruin. It was so disasterous in consequences that as many as 10,00,000 people were thrown out of employment.[30]

III. The question of shipment and limiting the supply

The East India Company had enjoyed monopoly of trade with India since its formation in 1600. It was modified by the Charter Act of 1793 by which licenced traders were allowed 3000 tons of shipping, with the condition that a special licence would be necessary for export and import of certain articles such as calicoes and muslins. In respect of the Cape trade, His Majesty's Order in Council issued in 1796 laid down specifically that all trade from India to Cape was to be in the hands of the East India Company or by their licencees.[31]

With the growth of India's trade with the Cape, the Company became apprehensive that if any but themselves or persons licenced by them were allowed to import goods in the Cape from the East of Cape, this settlement might become a depository and means be contrived to re-export these from Cape clandestinely to places which were then supplied with Indian goods from their own sales in Leadenstreet, London. They, therefore, wished to narrow and confine the trade of the Cape from India solely to meet the requirements of the inhabitants of the Colony and to furnish the supply by themselves.[32]

Dundas, Secretary of the Court of Directors, wrote on May 22, 1798, a letter to the Governor-General in India explaining this policy of the Company. The Board of Trade also directed that the Indents be framed upon the actual demand for consumption in the settlements, as an excess in the above articles might injure the Company's sales for the African market, and consequently His Majesty's Revenue.[34] Fear was expressed that if articles were supplied by individuals in excess of those wanted by the inhabitants and the garrison, these will be clandestinely transhipped from there to Europe.[35]

The test came when actually a cargo by a shipper arrived in the Cape Colony even after the declaration of this policy. The shipper (Messrs. Chase and Sewel) was not licenced by the East India Company, but carried a letter of recommendation from the Governor of Fort St. George. Macartney wrote a letter in protest to the Governor in which he pointed out that the accumulation of Indian articles in the Cape Colony, particularly of piece goods, would afford such temptation to commercial adventurers that "I fear no principles of fair dealing, no vigilance or vigour of Government could restrain or subdue".[36]

It is interesting to observe that there was a considerable smuggling trade in respect of finer Indian piece goods, which were so much in demand in Paris and fashionable circles in France and all over Europe. If the Company had not taken the above measures, goods would have gone to European markets clandestinely to be sold at fancy prices and from this neither the Company nor the Indian manufacturer, nor the

Cape Government would have got any benefit. In fact, the community at the Cape would have had to pay higher prices. After Napoleon's Continental Decree in 1806, a smuggling trade in Indian goods grew at a rapid pace. According to N.K. Sinha's estimate there were nearly 1,00,000 smugglers operating along the frontiers of France, following the Decree.[37]

Licenced traders, as a general rule, were permitted to supply sugar, grains and other provisions, not the piece goods. It was thought that such low priced commodities could not bear freight on company's ships. Export of gunpowder and saltpetre, however, remained the exclusive monopoly of the Company.

IV. Protection of the interest of the European settlers in the Colony.

The Court of Directors and the Board of Trade desired to keep the settlers, both the English and the Dutch, contented and happy.[38] Macartney, the Governor, accordingly devised a method of trade for the benefit of the consumers in the Colony. He laid down that the super cargoes of the private ships "should sell rice and other goods in proper lots by public auction, in such a manner as to ensure to the consumers the fair price of the market."[39] Dundas had also been very keen on such a policy and had directed that goods should be put up in small lots so that individuals may derive every advantage from the consignment.[40]

It was also laid down that Indian Government should load all the goods, if possible, on ships taken up by the Court at the reduced rate of freight in preference to the regular ships so that the prices be kept down.[41]

At the same time, the Board of Trade noted that the articles which the individuals had hitherto sent to the Cape had gone upon European ships and had been charged the full freight (of Extra ships to Europe) this they held was a hardship to the Cape settlers. So they directed that individuals should be permitted to supply all such articles as may be wanted for the use of the inhabitants and the garrison of the Cape, under such regulations as may prevent their being clandestinely transhipped to Europe. This was applied actually to sugar, grains and other low priced commodities.[42]

It was on the basis of this policy that Messrs Lambert Ross & Co. requested in a letter dated 17th December, 1800, to the Governor-General for permission to open a direct commercial intercourse between Bengal and the Cape, giving a list of articles which they wanted to ship there, namely rice, sugar, coarse calicoes, printed calicoes, cotton yarn, wax and tobacco. They hoped that trade in these commodities will be promoted greatly in this way.[43]

V. A new line of enquiry suggested

The foregoing gives an idea of exports during a period of flourishing export trade in the 18th century from the Bengal-Bihar region. The scope of this paper, being limited to trade, does not permit a study of the various centres of production and manufacture, some of which have now declined, but which were once important and are mentioned in the records of the end of the 18th century, such as Patna, Beerbhoom, Golacore, Cossimbazar, Baranagore, Aliabad, Rangpore, Ballasore, Santipore, Chandernagore, Hoglipore and Malda.[44] It will be a fruitful field of research for a historian to locate these centres, to study the history of their rise and growth from earlier times and their organisation and socio-economic structure.[45] Perhaps members of the Indian Historical Records Commission will encourage some young scholars to pursue this line of enquiry and research.

FOOT NOTE REFERENCES

1. I came across these documents in connection with my research on Indi-African trade. Dr.H.R.Ghosal had consulted only National Archives official records for his paper for I.H.R.C. in 1948.

2. Sir Henry Johnston, The Colonization of Africa, 1913, p. 135. Later estimates of Europeans are 16,000 in 1793 and 20,000 in 1798. Eric Walker, A History of Southern Africa, (1968), p. 125.

3. Letter from Messrs Lamber Ross & Co. dated 17.12.1800 to the Governor General of the East India Company requested for permission to open a direct commercial intercourse between Bengal and the Cape. They wanted to shift from Surat trade and concentrate on Bengal trade. O.C. 30-12-1800, No.58. In the first half of the 17th Century most of the East India Company's cotton cloth came either from Western (Gujarat Region) or North India (Agra region). K.N.Chaudhri, The East India Company, 1600-1640, (1965).

4. Macartney Papers (104) - Letter from Macartney to the Governor of Madras, dt. 9-11-1797.

5. Ibid. (108). Letter from Macartney to the Governor of Bombay, dt. 2.2.1798. The Cape Colony was producing wine meat and some wheat.

6. Milburn tells us that of the various industries which flourished in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the manufacture of cotton cloth was by far the most important. Bengal cotton piece - goods were noted abroad alike for their singular beauty and endless variety; and down to the first decade of the nineteenth century, they were extensively shipped to all parts of the world. Milburn, Oriental Commerce, Vol.2, pp. 111-221.

7. Their tastes and fashions were very much inherited from their European background. Indian calico was so much popular in Holland that one type of calico was called 'hollands'. A contempory soujourner in the cape, Captain Robert Percival, gives an interesting description of the habits, customs and manners of the settler in 1796. He says that the Dutch were very fond of smoking; they did not like coffee, the British introduced Coffee - drinking for the first time; that the Dutch women were more mannerly and hospitable than their men-folk. His report about the dress is that they did not change dress often. But he praises their beds which were made of sheets of calicos stuffed with feathers "so fine and downy, that one sinks quite in a hollow immediately on getting into them". Captain Robert Perceival, An Account of the Cape of Good Hope, 1796, pp.256-259.

8. This was because the private trader was supplying cotton piece goods and so these goods were not to be found in official indents for this year.

9. Macartney Papers (105) list of Bengal Goods required for the inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope.

10. Enclosure of Letter from Board of Trade, dt. 7.6.1799, O.C. 20 & 21.

11. P.P. 2190-1, O.C. 22.5.1800, No.16.

12. Birbhoom Gerahhs: a species of coarse calico.

13. Cossimbazar Bandeloes: a species of silk piece goods.

14. Baranagore is a place about 10 kilometres north of Calcutta; was an important centre, at the time, of cotton manufacture.

15. P.P. 3029-31, O.C. 16.10.1800, No.10. The chief centre of Chintz manufacture was Patna. Buchanan, Patna-Gaya Report II, pp. 655-56. Bachanan also says that Patna chintz although coarser than that of Lucknow and Calcutta was purchased by the Americans or the Portuguese in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Ibid.

16. Milburn has mentioned ninety different kinds of piece goods which were exported from Bengal to Great Britain towards the end of the 18th century, Milburn, Oriental Commerce, Vol.2, p.221.

17. About sugar it is interesting to note that "cutcha boorah cheenee" was not liked at the Cape; so the major supply was that of 'the fairer and whiter variety manufactured at Benares and Rungpore.' Letter dt. 20.9.1799 to the Board of Trade from Fort William.

18. P.P. 2192-4; O.C. 22.5.1800, No.16. (Fergusson's List).

19. P.P. 2190-1, op.cit

20. Letter dt. 7.6.1799 from the Board of Trade, enclosing a list of articles. O.C. No.20.

21. P.P. 2192-4, op.cit.

22. O.C. No.20, op.cit.

23. Ibid.

24. Minute of the Board of Trade, dt. 19.6.1798, I.O.L. No.5, Vol.61.

25. Gun Powder was meant for the use of the Garrison at the Cape dt. 20.8.1800. Pol. Consultation 28.4.1797, No.1.

26. Letter from Dr.Boxburgh, Supdt. of Botanical Garden, Calcutta to Board of Trade; reporting that three chests of plants and a box of seeds are ready for transmission to the Cape of Good Hope, O.C.No.39.

27. H.Wilson, A Review of the External Commerce of Bengal, p.98.

28. Ibid.

29. From Court dt. 13.7.1818 and 26.7.1819. Proceedings of the Board of Trade, vol. 454.

30. N.K.Sinha, Economic History of Bengal, III, p.8.

31. Macartney papers, No.101.

32. Ibid. No.106, letter dt. 6.1.1798. From Macartney to the Governor General of the East India Company in Calcutta.

33. I.O.Lib., Bengal Pub. Progs. Vol. 61, H 745-748.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Macartney papers No.113, Letter dt. 22.10.1798 from Macartney to the Governor of Fort St.George.

37. N.K.Sinha, op.cit., p.2.

38. Minutes of the Board of Trade dt. 19.6.1798 showed concern about the rise in the price of sugar and other cheaper commodities as it was thought such a rise would seriously affect the feelings of the Dutch settlers.

39. Letter of Dundas dt. 22.5.1798, I.O.Lib., No.5, Vol.61, H-745-748.

40. Letter of Dundas, Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. O.C. 30 Dec.1800, No.58.

44. From other sources, one gets an idea of other centres of production of cotton piece goods. Some of the important ones were: Dacca, Sonagra, Vikrumpooru, Gurup, Haripal, Rajbalhat, Krishnadebpur, Kirpai, Radhanagar, Harial, Chandrakona (in Bengal) and Dinajpur, Shahabad, Gaya and Purnea (in Bengal)

There are to be found in Martin, Eastern India, Vol.II and Buchanan, district reports.

45. The scholars may find it useful to employ the methodology which the sociologists employ in studying these centres. One can survey and study the present state and pattern of industries of the places and then carry out research backwards as far as one could go. However, local tradition can be collected and stored and employed for research purposes. One may find interesting data on social and economic change, caste basis of certain types of weaving and dying, community specialisation in certain types of weaving or flowering on cloth, the age and sex as factors in the production. Even some idea about the habits of the people can be formed on the basis of the quality and quantity of production; for instance, Buchanan says in connection with the weaving industry of the Purnea district that "the small product was due to the uncommon sloth of the people", Buchanan, Purnea Report, p.543.